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Patent Application for:

AUDIO AND VIDEO DIGITAL CONTENT DELIVERY

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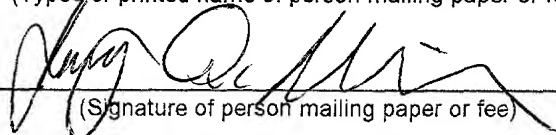
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10 **AUDIO AND VIDEO DIGITAL CONTENT DELIVERY**
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13 **FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

14 This invention relates generally to the field of digital content delivery systems
15 and methods. More particularly, this invention relates to a system and method for
16 purchase of portions of Audio/Video (A/V) content, such as for example a motion
17 picture soundtrack, as a product distinct from the A/V content as a whole.
18

19 **BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

20 With the emergence of broadband communication media, it is widely
21 anticipated that full-length feature motion pictures and other A/V content will be
22 available for purchase or rent in digital form via download or streaming from a
23 content provider on a widespread basis. Purchase or rent may entail a transfer of
24 rights under a digital rights management system, in which the rights transferred are
25 transferred with, or in accordance with a "usage rule." The usage rule defines the
26 nature of the rights acquired in the transaction. This new distribution mechanism
27 presents new possibilities for the generation of revenue.

28 Often when one views a motion picture, one might enjoy the soundtrack
29 associated with the motion picture and be inclined to purchase such a soundtrack.

1 However, in general the motion picture viewer is rarely presented with an
2 immediate opportunity to purchase the soundtrack and may lose interest by the
3 time a purchase opportunity presents itself. Thus, opportunities for sale of the
4 soundtrack content may be missed. Similar opportunities may exist for sale of
5 other audio or video portions of A/V content, for example purchase of a theme song
6 from a television program or purchase of a music selection featured in a music
7 video.

8 9 **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

10 Thus, there is need for systems and methods for acquiring rights to portions
11 of A/V content separate and distinct from the full A/V content. The present
12 invention relates generally to digital content delivery methods and apparatus for
13 satisfying this need. Objects, advantages and features of the invention will
14 become apparent to those skilled in the art upon consideration of the following
15 detailed description of the invention.

16 In one embodiment consistent with the present invention, a method of
17 purchasing a soundtrack associated with A/V content is provided. When A/V
18 content is purchased by download or otherwise, the user is provided with an option
19 to purchase or store the soundtrack. In one embodiment, the purchase of the
20 motion picture secures usage rights to the soundtrack while another embodiment
21 requires separate purchase of the soundtrack. In either case, the user is enabled
22 to store the soundtrack as a separate file after having purchased rights to do so.
23 The soundtrack is then stored, in some embodiments with digital rights
24 management or copy protection to limit the number of copies that can be made of
25 the soundtrack. The motion picture has a Table of Contents (TOC) indexing the
26 soundtrack portions of the audio content of the motion picture to enable extraction
27 of those portions of the motion picture forming the soundtrack.

28 In one embodiment consistent with aspects of the present invention, a
29 method of delivering digital content comprises transferring audio/video (A/V)
30 content in digital form from a content provider to a customer, the digital form of the

1 A/V content comprising at least an audio portion and a video portion; providing the
2 customer with an option to complete a transaction for a selected one of the portions
3 of the A/V content; and in the event the customer elects to complete the transaction
4 for the selected portion, enabling the customer to store the selected portion distinct
5 from the A/V content.

6 In another embodiment consistent with aspects of the present invention, a
7 method of purchasing digital content comprises transferring audio/video (A/V)
8 content in digital form from a content provider to a customer, the digital form of the
9 A/V content comprising at least an audio portion and a video portion; completing
10 a transaction for a selected one of the portions of the A/V content; and storing the
11 selected portion as at least one digital file distinct from the A/V content.

12 In another embodiment consistent with aspects of the present invention, a
13 method of delivering digital content comprises receiving a request from a customer
14 for transfer of A/V content in digital form to the customer; receiving payment from
15 the customer for the transfer of the A/V content in accordance with a first usage
16 rule; transferring audio/video (A/V) content in digital form from a content provider
17 to the customer in accordance with the first usage rule, the digital form of the A/V
18 content comprising at least an audio portion and a video portion; providing the
19 customer with an option to complete a transaction for a selected one of the portions
20 of the A/V content; receiving a request from the customer to complete the
21 transaction for the selected portion; and enabling the customer to store the
22 selected portion as at least one digital file distinct from the A/V content.

23 In another embodiment consistent with aspects of the present invention, a
24 method of acquiring rights to digital content, comprises sending a request to
25 acquire digital rights in A/V content to a content provider; sending a payment for the
26 digital rights to the content provider; receiving audio/video (A/V) content in digital
27 form from the content provider, the digital form of the A/V content comprising at
28 least an audio portion and a video portion; receiving an option to acquire digital
29 rights to a selected portion of the A/V content; sending a request to the content
30 provider acquire digital rights to the selected portion; and

1 storing the selected portion distinct from the A/V content.

2 In another embodiment consistent with aspects of the present invention, a
3 method of delivering digital content comprises providing audio/video (A/V) content
4 in digital form from a content provider to a customer, the digital form of the A/V
5 content comprising at least an audio portion and a video portion; providing the
6 customer with an option to store the selected portion of the A/V content; and in the
7 event the customer elects to store the selected portion, enabling the customer to
8 store the selected portion distinct from the A/V content.

9 A method of acquiring digital content, consistent with an embodiment of the
10 present invention comprises receiving audio/video (A/V) content in digital form from
11 a content provider to a customer, the digital form of the A/V content comprising at
12 least an audio portion and a video portion; and storing one of the portions as a
13 selected portion distinct from the A/V content.

14 In another embodiment consistent with aspects of the present invention, a
15 method of storing audio/video (A/V) content comprises storing a video portion;
16 storing an audio portion; wherein the A/V content comprises at least the video
17 portion together with the audio portion; and storing a table of contents (TOC) that
18 indexes a selected one of the audio and video portions in a manner that permits
19 retrieval of the selected portion.

20 Any of the processes described above can be carried out on a programmed
21 processor and instructions for carrying out such processes can be stored on any
22 suitable storage medium and transmitted over any suitable transmission medium.

23 An e-commerce server consistent with an embodiment of the present
24 invention has a programmed processor. A mass storage device stores a selection
25 of A/V content, the A/V content comprising at least an audio portion, a video portion
26 and a table of contents (TOC) file indexing a selected one of the audio and video
27 portions. A program runs on the programmed processor, for: presenting a
28 customer with an opportunity to complete a transaction to acquire rights to the
29 selected one of the audio and video portions indexed by the TOC; and enabling the
30 customer to store the selected portion.

1 An apparatus for carrying out an e-commerce transaction consistent with an
2 embodiment of the present invention has a programmed processor. A mass
3 storage device is provided suitable for storing digital files. A program runs on the
4 programmed processor, for: presenting a user with an opportunity to complete a
5 transaction to acquire rights to a selected one of audio and video portions of A/V
6 content indexed by a table of contents (TOC); and enabling the user to store the
7 selected portion as a digital file by reference to the TOC.

8 The above summaries are intended to illustrate exemplary embodiments of
9 the invention, which will be best understood in conjunction with the detailed
10 description to follow, and are not intended to limit the scope of the appended
11 claims.

12 13 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

14 The features of the invention believed to be novel are set forth with
15 particularity in the appended claims. The invention itself however, both as to
16 organization and method of operation, together with objects and advantages
17 thereof, may be best understood by reference to the following detailed description
18 of the invention, which describes certain exemplary embodiments of the invention,
19 taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

20 **FIGURE 1** is a block diagram of an exemplary digital content delivery
21 arrangement consistent with an embodiment of the present invention.

22 **FIGURE 2** is a flow chart depicting a method consistent with an embodiment
23 of the present invention.

24 **FIGURE 3** is a flow chart depicting a method consistent with another
25 embodiment of the present invention.

26 **FIGURE 4** is a flow chart depicting an overall method of acquiring rights to
27 a portion of A/V content consistent with an embodiment of the present invention.

28 **FIGURE 5** is a flow chart depicting a method consistent with another
29 embodiment of the present invention in which A/V content is streamed.

1 **FIGURE 6** depicts the audio, video and TOC portions of A/V content
2 consistent with an embodiment of the present invention.

3 **FIGURE 7** is a flow chart depicting a method consistent with an embodiment
4 of the present invention for creation of the A/V content together with a TOC.

5 **FIGURE 8** illustrates a general purpose computer suitable for operating as
6 either server or user computer 104 for carrying various processes described herein.
7

8 **DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION**

9 While this invention is susceptible of embodiment in many different forms,
10 there is shown in the drawings and will herein be described in detail specific
11 embodiments, with the understanding that the present disclosure is to be
12 considered as an example of the principles of the invention and not intended to limit
13 the invention to the specific embodiments shown and described. In the description
14 below, like reference numerals are used to describe the same, similar or
15 corresponding parts in the several views of the drawings.

16 For purposes of the present invention, a purchase or rent of A/V content or
17 a portion thereof may entail a transfer of rights under a digital rights management
18 system, in which the rights transferred are transferred with, or in accordance with
19 a "usage rule." The usage rule defines the nature of the rights acquired in the
20 transaction. By way of example, and not limitation, a usage rule may define that
21 a user can, in exchange for compensation, "play" the content or portion thereof a
22 specific number of times before the content or portion thereof expires. Another
23 exemplary usage rule may define that a user can play the content or portion thereof
24 an unlimited number of times for a particular defined period of time before the
25 content or portion thereof expires. Another exemplary usage rule may define that
26 a user can play the content or portion thereof an unlimited number of times without
27 the content or portion thereof ever expiring. Other exemplary usage rules can
28 specify a number of copies that can be made of the content or the number of
29 machines the content can reside upon. The compensation may be paid directly,

1 as in the case of a purchase of rights over the Internet, or may be paid indirectly to
2 a third party (e.g., a service provider such as an Internet Service Provider or cable
3 system operator). The compensation may be for a specific selection of content or
4 for a package of content from which the user may make limited or unlimited
5 selections. The term "purchase" as used herein, thus generally refers to rights
6 acquired as a result of completing a transaction that may be restricted by a usage
7 rule.

8 Referring now to **FIGURE 1**, a system 100 can be utilized to purchase
9 audio/video content such as full-length motion pictures, films, videos, audio
10 soundtracks, interviews, concerts, television programs, etc. in digital form. In this
11 exemplary system 100, a user's personal computer 104 is connected to a content
12 provider 110 via the Internet 116 (or alternatively via any communication network,
13 wired or wireless, that can accommodate the transactions described herein). This
14 connection may be, but is not necessarily, effected using high-speed broadband
15 connections such as DSL, cable modem, etc., as well as wireless connections,
16 cable systems and other techniques.

17 The content provider 110 has a content database 120 containing a selection
18 of motion pictures or other A/V content that can be downloaded, streamed or
19 otherwise transferred to the user at computer 104. The A/V content, in accordance
20 with embodiments of the present invention, contains at least an audio portion and
21 a video portion. In embodiments consistent with the present invention, at least one
22 of either the audio portion, video portion or audio video portion (or equivalently parts
23 thereof) may be saved as one or more digital files that are separate and distinct
24 from the A/V content itself. The A/V content, in accordance with certain
25 embodiments of the present invention may be compressed. Compression such as
26 MPEG-2, MPEG-3, MPEG-4 and MPEG-7 or other suitable compression algorithms
27 may be used without departing from the present invention.

28 In one example, once the computer user of computer 104 has downloaded
29 a motion picture (or other A/V content that has an audio and a video portion), it is
30 desirable in one embodiment of the invention to provide that user with an option to

1 purchase (or otherwise acquire rights in accord with a usage rule to) a portion of
2 the A/V content (e.g., a soundtrack of the motion picture). Thus, for example, the
3 user upon viewing the motion picture or upon determining that he or she wishes to
4 purchase the soundtrack, can do so immediately. In this manner, the likelihood of
5 sale of the soundtrack is enhanced.

6 In accordance with certain embodiments, all of the music and other audio
7 content associated with a conventional soundtrack recording (or other portion of the
8 A/V content), as might be purchased in the form of a compact disc or saved in any
9 suitable digital format such as MP3, ATRAC, any of the MPEG standards, etc., is
10 available in an appropriate format on the downloaded motion picture. The
11 soundtrack (or other audio content) is appropriately indexed, for example, in a Table
12 of Contents file (TOC), so that the user can selectively copy the audio portion or
13 other selected portion of the motion picture. In this example, a motion picture will
14 normally have both audio and video portions as well as the TOC as described in
15 accordance with certain embodiments of the present invention.

16 Purchase and storage of an audio portion such as the soundtrack for the
17 motion picture may be carried out in any number of ways. **FIGURE 2** depicts one
18 such process 200 for carrying out a transaction, in which the user of computer 104
19 can effect such a purchase of rights to a motion picture soundtrack governed by a
20 usage rule that allows viewing the motion picture an unlimited number of times over
21 a set time period. This exemplary process starts at 204. At 208 the user
22 downloads a motion picture from content provider 110. This download process, in
23 general, will involve the user (1) contacting an appropriate web site wherein the
24 content provider 110 resides, (2) requesting purchase of rights to the motion
25 picture, (3) providing a payment mechanism such as electronic cash or credit card,
26 (4) and then receiving a download of a file or a plurality of files containing the
27 motion picture content.

28 In the embodiment illustrated, the user purchases the motion picture as a
29 download in a manner that provides the user with limited viewing rights to the
30 motion picture. In this example, the user is granted limited rights to view the motion

1 picture one or more times over a predetermined time period, for example measured
2 from the download time. Such a transaction, therefore, is analogous to a rental.
3 This embodiment is illustrated as only one possible embodiment with other
4 embodiments involving, e.g., an outright purchase of the motion picture as opposed
5 to more of a rental arrangement, or a one time or multiple time viewing
6 arrangement.

7 In the arrangement of process 200, a usage rule is provided based on time
8 of download or other trigger and an expiration criteria is set at 212 to initiate the
9 time period (or other criteria) during which the user has rights to view the motion
10 picture.

11 When the user wishes to view the motion picture or carry out another action
12 associated with the motion picture, the motion picture file is called (e.g., from an
13 appropriate media player application) to present the user with a menu at 226. This
14 menu can provide any number of functions such as those conventionally provided
15 in a digital versatile disc (DVD.) In the present embodiment, the user may elect to
16 play back the motion picture at 230, which initiates playing of the full motion picture
17 file. Once the criteria has expired (in this example, expiration of a time period) at
18 218, the motion picture is disabled in some suitable manner (e.g., erasure or
19 corruption of the file) at 222 so that the user can no longer view the motion picture.
20 Any attempt to view the motion picture will be responded to by a message that the
21 motion picture has expired.

22 The user may also elect to purchase the soundtrack (or other audio or video
23 or A/V content forming a part of the motion picture), in which case the computer
24 104 is initially connected to the content provider at 234 by appropriately addressing
25 a universal resource locator (URL), for example by calling a browser application.
26 The user then pays for the soundtrack at 234 by use of electronic cash or credit
27 card, for example. At 244 the content provider 110 provides the user with a key
28 code, in this embodiment. This key code may be an encryption key or other code
29 that, when entered by the user, permits the user to extract the soundtrack (or other
30 audio or video content) from the motion picture files at 250 and store the

1 soundtrack to local storage as one or more digital files or directly to recordable
2 media (e.g, magnetic media, optical media, CD ROM, DVD, etc.). The user may
3 also choose to exit at the menu 226 and the program exits at 260. In any event,
4 under the present scenario, the user can call the menu at 226 any time.

5 Under this scenario of process 200, the user purchases the rights to content
6 in the form of the motion picture for a set period of time and during that period of
7 time may view the motion picture any number of times (or some restricted number
8 of times.) The user may also, during that time period, elect to purchase the
9 soundtrack from the motion picture. This can be done from the start menu for the
10 motion picture. By providing the user with this option at the startup menu (which
11 may also be shown at the end of the motion picture as shown, and any time the
12 motion picture is paused or stopped) the user is more inclined to purchase the
13 soundtrack if he or she enjoyed the motion picture at the time of its presentation.
14 Thus, it is believed that the immediacy of the opportunity to purchase the
15 soundtrack will increase the opportunities for sale of the soundtrack. It is
16 anticipated, but not required, that the stored soundtrack or other audio portion will
17 have copyright protection to prevent copying or digital rights management to restrict
18 the number of copies that can be made or manner of copying of the soundtrack (or
19 place other restrictions on digital rights to the soundtrack in accordance with a
20 usage rule) so that illegal distribution of the soundtrack is inhibited. Such methods
21 are well known in the art.

22 **FIGURE 3** depicts another embodiment of a method, consistent of the
23 present invention, in which the user purchases rights to extract the soundtrack as
24 a part of the purchase of the motion picture. The process for **FIGURE 3** is shown
25 as process 300 starting at 304. At 308, the user contacts the content provider to
26 purchase the motion picture. The user purchases the motion picture from the
27 content provider at 314, with the purchase securing rights to the soundtrack. At
28 320 the user receives the motion picture from the content provider, in certain
29 embodiments as a download (but this should not be considered limiting as other

1 types of delivery of the content such as, for example, streaming and other real time
2 delivery technologies can also utilize the present invention). At 326 the user again
3 calls a similar menu that starts the motion picture or other motion picture related
4 functions. The user can elect to view the motion picture from this menu, and
5 playback occurs at 230. At the end of the motion picture, control returns to the
6 menu 326. The user may also choose to extract the soundtrack or other audio
7 portion at 350 and store it to local storage from menu 326, after which control
8 returns to menu 326. The user may also choose to exit menu 326 at 330.

9 Again the storage of the soundtrack at 350 may be (but is not necessarily)
10 effected using a type of copy protection which will limit the ability of the user to
11 make illegal copies. Process 200 and 300 show two mechanisms for effecting the
12 extraction and storage of a soundtrack or other audio portion of a motion picture
13 based upon various purchase assumptions. However, those skilled in the art will
14 also recognize that the user may purchase the motion picture content for a set
15 period of time as described in connection with process 200 with that purchase also
16 securing the right to extract and store a soundtrack as in process 300. Those
17 skilled in the art will appreciate that many purchase scenarios are possible within
18 the scope of the present invention wherein the user is provided with the ability to
19 extract a soundtrack (or other audio or video portion) from a motion picture (or other
20 A/V content) and thus treat it distinctly from the motion picture, e.g., purchasing,
21 renting or receiving the soundtrack in accordance with digital rights defined by a
22 usage rule.

23 Heretofore, embodiments of the present invention have been described in
24 conjunction with an exemplary embodiment wherein rights to store a motion picture
25 soundtrack are acquired in conjunction with use of the motion picture itself.
26 **FIGURE 4**, however, illustrates in flow chart 400 another process consistent with
27 the present invention in which digital rights to A/V content are acquired having an
28 audio portion and a video portion at 404 under the terms of one or more usage
29 rules. If the customer completes a transaction to obtain rights to one of the audio
30 or video portion at 408, either as part of the process of obtaining the A/V content

1 or prior to or subsequent thereto, then the portion for which rights are acquired
2 survives at 412. Otherwise, assuming no persistent rights are retained, all of the
3 content expires at 416. Thus, a customer can purchase rights to a portion of the
4 A/V content separate and distinct from the A/V content itself. Those rights are
5 independent (and possibly governed by separate and distinct usage rules) from
6 those associated with the original A/V content containing both audio and video
7 portions. The portion for which digital rights are acquired under the transaction of
8 408 may be audio, video or some combination thereof (e.g., an interview appearing
9 as part of a documentary, a sequence of still images extracted from video content,
10 or a music video appearing as a portion of other A/V content).

11 In one embodiment consistent with the present invention, the A/V content
12 might be acquired by streaming technologies as illustrated in **FIGURE 5** in process
13 500. In this embodiment, the customer can be presented with the A/V content
14 using streaming technology in 506 (or similarly, using real time transmission
15 technologies as with digital cable television broadcasts). The customer is
16 presented with an option to acquire rights to various portions of the streaming A/V
17 content and, if he or she chooses to complete such a transaction at 510, the portion
18 selected is downloaded at 514 to the customer. No such download takes place,
19 as illustrated by 518, in the event the transaction is not completed. Many such
20 variations are possible within the scope of the present invention.

21 As previously described, one technique for enabling the customer to extract
22 a portion of the A/V content is illustrated in **FIGURE 6**. In this example, the A/V
23 content itself is shown conceptually as two separate parts - - audio part 608 and
24 video part 612. In addition, a table of contents (TOC) file 620 is shown. In this
25 example, the portion that can be extracted for separate storage is a portion of the
26 full audio part 608. This could, for example, represent the soundtrack of a motion
27 picture. Each entry in the TOC file 620 points to a segment of data in the audio part
28 608. When the customer completes the transaction to acquire rights to the audio
29 portion indexed by the TOC 620, the segments pointed to by the TOC 620 are

1 extracted and stored. While this illustration may suggest that the audio part 608
2 and the video part 612 are completely separated within the A/V content, this is not
3 intended to be limiting and is illustrated in this manner for clarity. In fact, in digital
4 transmissions such as an MPEG transport stream, audio, video and control data
5 are intermingled in data packets that are sorted in accordance with the type of
6 packet by a demultiplexer residing in receiving hardware or software. Accordingly,
7 the TOC file may point to packet numbers, time stamps, or other identifiers as
8 dictated by the specific technology employed to encode the A/V content to
9 designate appropriate portions of the A/V content that can be separately stored.
10 Thus, whatever technology is employed, the content provider may designate
11 specific portions of A/V technology that can be separately acquired and establish
12 rules for acquisition of those portions.

13 A TOC 620 can be generated by the content provider as illustrated in
14 **FIGURE 7** in process 700 starting at 704. If not already digitally encoded, the A/V
15 content of interest is digitally encoded at 708 using any suitable encoding
16 technique. The content provider determines at 712 which portions of the content
17 are to be made available for a customer to acquire separate rights at 712. Those
18 portions of the content are then indexed at 716 and the index is stored as a TOC file
19 at 720. The process ends at 726. Although illustrated as a single TOC file indexing
20 a single portion of the A/V content throughout, this should not be considered
21 limiting since multiple TOC files can be created indexing multiple portions of the
22 A/V content. Similarly, a single TOC file can be used to index multiple portions of
23 the A/V content without departing from the present invention. Additionally, the TOC
24 can index the entire audio portion 608, the entire video portion 612 or any part
25 thereof, which is to be considered an audio portion or a video portion, without
26 departing from the invention.

27 The processes previously described as carried out on a computer system,
28 for example, a computer system which resides at the content provider 110, or an
29 agent thereof, and functions as an electronic commerce (e-commerce) server or
30 user computer 104. Such a computer system is depicted in **FIGURE 8** as 800.

1 Computer system 800 includes a central processor unit (CPU) 810 with an
2 associated bus 815 used to connect the central processor unit 810 to Random
3 Access Memory 820 and Non-Volatile Memory 830 in a known manner. An output
4 mechanism at 840 may be provided in order to display or print output for the
5 computer administrator. Similarly, input devices such as keyboard and mouse 850
6 may be provided for the input of information from the computer administrator.
7 Computer 800 also may include disc storage 860, or any mass storage media
8 known in the art, for storing large amounts of information such as the content
9 database 120 as well as any other information as required. Computer system 800
10 is coupled to the network (e.g., the Internet) using a network connection 870 such
11 as an Ethernet adapter coupling computer system 800 through a fire wall and/or
12 locally a network to the Internet. In the case of the user computer 104, a modem
13 or other access device (not shown) may also be present. The computer system
14 800 could be embodied in a personal computer, a Set-Top Box or any other
15 suitable consumer electronic device.

16 Storage of the selected portion of the A/V content may be on local mass
17 storage such as the hard disc drive 860 or a CD ROM (not shown), or may be to a
18 designated storage location on a network (e.g., a designated storage location on
19 the Internet, or a file server on a local or wide area network).

20 Those skilled in the art will recognize that the present invention has been
21 described in terms of exemplary embodiments based upon use of a programmed
22 processor. However, the invention should not be so limited, since the present
23 invention could be implemented using hardware component equivalents such as
24 special purpose hardware and/or dedicated processors which are equivalents to
25 the invention as described and claimed. Similarly, general purpose computers,
26 microprocessor based computers, micro-controllers, optical computers, analog
27 computers, dedicated processors and/or dedicated hard wired logic may be used
28 to construct alternative equivalent embodiments of the present invention.

29 Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the program steps and associated
30 data (e.g., the soundtrack files) used to implement the embodiments described

1 above can be implemented using disc storage as well as other forms of storage
2 including, but not limited to, Compact Discs (CD), Read Only Memory (ROM)
3 devices, Random Access Memory (RAM) devices; optical storage elements,
4 magnetic storage elements, magneto-optical storage elements, flash memory, core
5 memory and/or other equivalent storage technologies without departing from the
6 present invention. Such alternative storage devices should be considered
7 equivalents.

8 The present invention, as described in embodiments described herein, is
9 implemented in certain embodiments using a programmed processor executing
10 programming instructions that are broadly described above in flow chart form that
11 can be stored on any suitable electronic storage medium or transmitted over any
12 suitable electronic communication medium. However, those skilled in the art will
13 appreciate that the processes described above can be implemented in any number
14 of variations and in many suitable programming languages without departing from
15 the present invention. For example, the order of certain operations carried out can
16 often be varied, and additional operations can be added or operations can be
17 removed without departing from the invention. Error trapping can be added and/or
18 enhanced and variations can be made in user interface and information
19 presentation without departing from the present invention. Such variations are
20 contemplated and considered equivalent.

21 While the invention has been described in conjunction with specific
22 embodiments, it is evident that many alternatives, modifications, permutations and
23 variations will become apparent to those skilled in the art in light of the foregoing
24 description. Accordingly, it is intended that the present invention embrace all such
25 alternatives, modifications and variations as fall within the scope of the appended
26 claims.

27 What is claimed is: